

April 14, 2010

Kris Dickens, Mother of two, Adoption Caseworker

Madam Chair Valentine, Mr. Vice Chair Kurtz, Representative Less,  
Members of the Committee, Distinguished Guests, and Ladies and Gentlemen:  
Thank you for the opportunity to provide written remarks in support of HBs 4006  
and 4015.

I am the mother of two wonderful girls. My oldest was born to my husband and I eleven years ago. Our youngest daughter was adopted from Russia in 2004. My oldest daughter knows her German and English heritage, her birth families physical features and characteristics, and endless stories of ancestry. My youngest is proud to have been born in Russia and learns the richness of her heritage through us, her family. We decorate Easter eggs the "American" way with food coloring and vinegar as well as the "Russian" way by boiling eggs with the skins of red onions to get their color. We celebrate the Feast of St. Nicholas every December, not because my husband or I were raised with such a tradition, but because our youngest daughter's birth family might in Russia. We embrace her heritage as we do our own. It is her right. It is part of who she is. It is also her right to know her birth name and to have access to her original birth certificate when she is an adult. I am her mother. With all of my heart and soul, I am her mother. As her mother, I advocate for her rights, or what rights she should have. This isn't about me or her birth parents, this is about a child's right to learn their identity.

I am an adoption caseworker. This is also my professional belief. I have the pleasure of watching children come into their families through adoption day after day. I have the pleasure of seeing attachment and love take root amongst families day after day. I also know that these children grow into teenagers and young adults with questions of whom they are and where they came from. It is not uncommon for adopted children to feel curiosity and wonder about their birth families, it is part of their identity. Some children have been known to create a story about their birth parent(s) as being royalty or professional athletes or movie stars because they know nothing different and need to know something. Who would you fantasize your birth parent(s) to be if you didn't know who they were? Wouldn't you always wonder? Adoptees often speak of feeling like a piece of them is missing. They live their lives having their adoption story told to them or for them. Our children need to speak for themselves. Having access to their original birth certificate is a place for them to begin finding those missing pieces.

Adoption is a beautiful plan for birth parents who do not feel like they can parent. It is a gift to people like me who have grown their family through adoption. It is in my opinion that legislation needs to reflect the continued support and encouragement of adoption as a choice **and** allow children placed for adoption a connection to their identity. It can be done. We should no longer allow or encourage birth parent(s) responsibility to be so easily expunged, to pretend they never gave birth to a child by not allowing adopted children access to their original birth certificates. Birth parents are provided choices. What are we providing for the children? At the very least, we should provide them with the right to have access to their original birth certificate as an adult.

We have our daughter's original birth certificate. She will have access to it as an adult. My husband and I are not fearful or worried about that time in her life. We are thankful. We are thankful that adoption gave us the gift of being her parents, her our daughter, and our daughters, each other's sister. We are thankful that she will have the name of her birth mother to contact if she chooses. We are thankful she has that choice. We are thankful she has that right. We are thankful to walk that journey with her, supporting her, helping her find her missing piece.